LAST POEMS

HOUSMAN

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UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

A SHROPSHIRE LAD

By

A. E. HOUSMAN

$1.50

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LAST POEMS

BY

A. E. HOUSMAN

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I PUBLISH these poems, few though they are, because it is not likely that I shall ever be impelled to write much more. I can no longer expect to be revisited by the continuous excitement under which in the early months of 1895 I wrote the greater part of my other book, nor indeed could I well sustain it if it came; and it is best that what I have written should be printed while I am here to see it through the press and control its spelling and punctuation. About a quarter of this matter belongs to the April of the present year, but most of it to dates between 1895 and 1910.

September 1922

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We'll to the woods no more,
The laurels all are cut,
The bowers are bare of bay
That once the Muses wore;
The year draws in the day
And soon will evening shut:
The laurels all are cut,
We'll to the woods no more.
Oh we'll no more, no more
To the leafy woods away,
To the high wild woods of laurel
And the bowers of bay no more.

I

THE WEST

Beyond the moor and mountain crest
—Comrade, look not on the west—
The sun is down and drinks away
From air and land the lees of day.

The long cloud and the single pine
Sentinel the ending line,
And out beyond it, clear and wan,
Reach the gulfs of evening on.

The son of woman turns his brow
West from forty counties now,
And, as the edge of heaven he eyes,
Thinks eternal thoughts, and sighs.

Oh wide's the world, to rest or roam,
With change abroad and cheer at home,
Fights and furloughs, talk and tale,
Company and beef and ale.

But if I front the evening sky
Silent on the west look I,
And my comrade, stride for stride,
Paces silent at my side.

Comrade, look not on the west:
'Twill have the heart out of your breast;
'Twill take your thoughts and sink them far,
Leagues beyond the sunset bar.

Oh lad, I fear that yon's the sea
Where they fished for you and me,
And there, from whence we both were ta'en,
You and I shall drown again.

Send not on your soul before
To dive from that beguiling shore,
And let not yet the swimmer leave
His clothes upon the sands of eve.

Too fast to yonder strand forlorn
We journey, to the sunken bourn,
To flush the fading tinges eyed
By other lads at eventide.

Wide is the world, to rest or roam,
And early 'tis for turning home:
Plant your heel on earth and stand,
And let's forget our native land.

When you and I are spilt on air
Long we shall be strangers there;
Friends of flesh and bone are best:
Comrade, look not on the west.

II

As I gird on for fighting
  My sword upon my thigh,
I think on old ill fortunes
  Of better men than I.

Think I, the round world over,
  What golden lads are low
With hurts not mine to mourn for
  And shames I shall not know.

What evil luck soever
  For me remains in store,
'Tis sure much finer fellows
  Have fared much worse before.

So here are things to think on
  That ought to make me brave,
As I strap on for fighting
  My sword that will not save.

III

Her strong enchantments failing,
Her towers of fear in wreck,
Her limbecks dried of poisons
And the knife at her neck,

The Queen of air and darkness
Begins to shrill and cry,
"O young man, O my slayer,
To-morrow you shall die."

O Queen of air and darkness,
I think 'tis truth you say,
And I shall die to-morrow;
But you will die to-day.

IV

ILLIC JACET

Oh hard is the bed they have made him,
And common the blanket and cheap;
But there he will lie as they laid him:
Where else could you trust him to sleep?

To sleep when the bugle is crying
And cravens have heard and are brave,
When mothers and sweethearts are sighing
And lads are in love with the grave.

Oh dark is the chamber and lonely,
And lights and companions depart;
But lief will he lose them and only
Behold the desire of his heart.

And low is the roof, but it covers
A sleeper content to repose;
And far from his friends and his lovers
He lies with the sweetheart he chose.

V

GRENADIER

The Queen she sent to look for me,
The sergeant he did say,
"Young man, a soldier will you be
For thirteen pence a day?"

For thirteen pence a day did I
Take off the things I wore,
And I have marched to where I lie,
And I shall march no more.

My mouth is dry, my shirt is wet,
My blood runs all away,
So now I shall not die in debt
For thirteen pence a day.

To-morrow after new young men
The sergeant he must see,
For things will all be over then
Between the Queen and me.

And I shall have to bate my price,
For in the grave, they say,
Is neither knowledge nor device
Nor thirteen pence a day.

VI

LANCER

I 'LISTED at home for a lancer,
Oh who would not sleep with the brave?
I 'listed at home for a lancer
To ride on a horse to my grave.

And over the seas we were bidden
A country to take and to keep;
And far with the brave I have ridden,
And now with the brave I shall sleep.

For round me the men will be lying
That learned me the way to behave,
And showed me my business of dying:
Oh who would not sleep with the brave?

They ask and there is not an answer;
Says I, I will 'list for a lancer,
Oh who would not sleep with the brave?

And I with the brave shall be sleeping
At ease on my mattress of loam,
When back from their taking and keeping
The squadron is riding at home.

The wind with the plumes will be playing,
The girls will stand watching them wave,
And eyeing my comrades and saying
Oh who would not sleep with the brave?

They ask and there is not an answer;
Says you, I will 'list for a lancer,
Oh who would not sleep with the brave?

VII

In valleys green and still
  Where lovers wander maying
They hear from over hill
  A music playing.

Behind the drum and fife,
  Past hawthornwood and hollow,
Through earth and out of life
  The soldiers follow.

The soldier's is the trade:
  In any wind or weather
He steals the heart of maid
  And man together.

The lover and his lass
  Beneath the hawthorn lying
Have heard the soldiers pass,
  And both are sighing.

And down the distance they
  With dying note and swelling
Walk the resounding way
  To the still dwelling.

VIII

Soldier from the wars returning,
Spoiler of the taken town,
Here is ease that asks not earning;
Turn you in and sit you down.

Peace is come and wars are over,
Welcome you and welcome all,
While the charger crops the clover
And his bridle hangs in stall.

Now no more of winters biting,
Filth in trench from fall to spring,
Summers full of sweat and fighting
For the Kesar or the King.

Rest you, charger, rust you, bridle;
Kings and kesars, keep your pay;
Soldier, sit you down and idle
At the inn of night for aye.

IX

The chestnut casts his flambeaux, and the flowers
Stream from the hawthorn on the wind away,
The doors clap to, the pane is blind with showers.
Pass me the can, lad; there's an end of May.

There's one spoilt spring to scant our mortal lot,
One season ruined of our little store.
May will be fine next year as like as not:
Oh, ay, but then we shall be twenty-four.

We for a certainty are not the first
Have sat in taverns while the tempest hurled
Their hopeful plans to emptiness, and cursed
Whatever brute and blackguard made the world.

It is in truth iniquity on high
To cheat our sentenced souls of aught they crave,
And mar the merriment as you and I
Fare on our long fool's-errand to the grave.

Iniquity it is; but pass the can.
My lad, no pair of kings our mothers bore;
Our only portion is the estate of man:
We want the moon, but we shall get no more.

If here to-day the cloud of thunder lours
To-morrow it will hie on far behests;
The flesh will grieve on other bones than ours
Soon, and the soul will mourn in other breasts.

The troubles of our proud and angry dust
Are from eternity, and shall not fail.
Bear them we can, and if we can we must.
Shoulder the sky, my lad, and drink your ale.

X

Could man be drunk for ever
With liquor, love, or fights,
Lief should I rouse at morning
And lief lie down of nights.

But men at whiles are sober
And think by fits and starts,
And if they think, they fasten
Their hands upon their hearts.

XI

YONDER see the morning blink:
  The sun is up, and up must I,
To wash and dress and eat and drink
And look at things and talk and think
  And work, and God knows why.

Oh often have I washed and dressed
  And what's to show for all my pain?
Let me lie abed and rest:
Ten thousand times I've done my best
  And all's to do again.

XII

The laws of God, the laws of man,
He may keep that will and can;
Not I: let God and man decree
Laws for themselves and not for me;
And if my ways are not as theirs
Let them mind their own affairs.
Their deeds I judge and much condemn,
Yet when did I make laws for them?
Please yourselves, say I, and they
Need only look the other way.
But no, they will not; they must still
Wrest their neighbour to their will,
And make me dance as they desire
With jail and gallows and hell-fire.
And how am I to face the odds
Of man's bedevilment and God's?
I, a stranger and afraid
In a world I never made.

They will be master, right or wrong;
Though both are foolish, both are strong.
And since, my soul, we cannot fly
To Saturn nor to Mercury,
Keep we must, if keep we can,
These foreign laws of God and man.

XIII

THE DESERTER

"What sound awakened me, I wonder,
For now 'tis dumb."
"Wheels on the road most like, or thunder:
Lie down; 'twas not the drum."

"Toil at sea and two in haven
And trouble far:
Fly, crow, away, and follow, raven,
And all that croaks for war."

"Hark, I heard the bugle crying,
And where am I?
My friends are up and dressed and dying,
And I will dress and die."

"Oh love is rare and trouble plenty
And carrion cheap,
And daylight dear at four-and-twenty:
Lie down again and sleep."

"Reach me my belt and leave your prattle:
Your hour is gone;
But my day is the day of battle,
And that comes dawning on.

"They mow the field of man in season:
Farewell, my fair,
And, call it truth or call it treason,
Farewell the vows that were."

"Ay, false heart, forsake me lightly:
'Tis like the brave.
They find no bed to joy in rightly
Before they find the grave.

"Their love is for their own undoing,
And east and west
They scour about the world a-wooing
The bullet to their breast.

"Sail away the ocean over,
Oh sail away,
And lie there with your leaden lover
For ever and a day."

XIV

THE CULPRIT

The night my father got me
  His mind was not on me;
He did not plague his fancy
  To muse if I should be
  The son you see.

The day my mother bore me
  She was a fool and glad,
For all the pain I cost her,
  That she had borne the lad
  That borne she had.

My mother and my father
  Out of the light they lie;
The warrant would not find them,
  And here 'tis only I
  Shall hang so high.

Oh let not man remember
The soul that God forgot,
But fetch the county kerchief
And noose me in the knot,
And I will rot.

For so the game is ended
That should not have begun.
My father and my mother
They had a likely son,
And I have none.

XV

EIGHT O'CLOCK

He stood, and heard the steeple
Sprinkle the quarters on the morning town.
One, two, three, four, to market-place and people
It tossed them down.

Strapped, noosed, nighing his hour,
He stood and counted them and cursed his luck;
And then the clock collected in the tower
Its strength, and struck.

XVI

SPRING MORNING

Star and coronal and bell
  April underfoot renews,
And the hope of man as well
  Flowers among the morning dews.

Now the old come out to look,
  Winter past and winter's pains,
How the sky in pool and brook
  Glitters on the grassy plains.

Easily the gentle air
  Wafts the turning season on;
Things to comfort them are there,
  Though 'tis true the best are gone.

Now the scorned unlucky lad
  Rousing from his pillow gnawn
Mans his heart and deep and glad
  Drinks the valiant air of dawn.

Half the night he longed to die,
  Now are sown on hill and plain
Pleasures worth his while to try
  Ere he longs to die again.

Blue the sky from east to west
  Arches, and the world is wide,
Though the girl he loves the best
  Rouses from another's side.

XVII

ASTRONOMY

The Wain upon the northern steep
  Descends and lifts away.
Oh I will sit me down and weep
  For bones in Africa.

For pay and medals, name and rank,
  Things that he has not found,
He hove the Cross to heaven and sank
  The pole-star underground.

And now he does not even see
  Signs of the nadir roll
At night over the ground where he
  Is buried with the pole.

XVIII

The rain, it streams on stone and hillock,
The boot clings to the clay.
Since all is done that's due and right
Let's home; and now, my lad, good-night,
For I must turn away.

Good-night, my lad, for nought's eternal;
No league of ours, for sure.
To-morrow I shall miss you less,
And ache of heart and heaviness
Are things that time should cure.

Over the hill the highway marches
And what's beyond is wide:
Oh soon enough will pine to nought
Remembrance and the faithful thought
That sits the grave beside.

The skies, they are not always raining
  Nor grey the twelvemonth through;
And I shall meet good days and mirth,
And range the lovely lands of earth
  With friends no worse than you.

But oh, my man, the house is fallen
  That none can build again;
My man, how full of joy and woe
Your mother bore you years ago
  To-night to lie in the rain.

XIX

In midnights of November,
  When Dead Man's Fair is nigh,
And danger in the valley,
  And anger in the sky,

Around the huddling homesteads
  The leafless timber roars,
And the dead call the dying
  And finger at the doors.

Oh, yonder faltering fingers
  Are hands I used to hold;
Their false companion drowses
  And leaves them in the cold.

Oh, to the bed of ocean,
  To Africk and to Ind,
I will arise and follow
  Along the rainy wind.

The night goes out and under
With all its train forlorn;
Hues in the east assemble
And cocks crow up the morn.

The living are the living
And dead the dead will stay,
And I will sort with comrades
That face the beam of day.

XX

The night is freezing fast,
To-morrow comes December;
And winterfalls of old
Are with me from the past;
And chiefly I remember
How Dick would hate the cold.

Fall, winter, fall; for he,
Prompt hand and headpiece clever,
Has woven a winter robe,
And made of earth and sea
His overcoat for ever,
And wears the turning globe.

XXI

The fairies break their dances
And leave the printed lawn,
And up from India glances
The silver sail of dawn.

The candles burn their sockets,
The blinds let through the day,
The young man feels his pockets
And wonders what's to pay.

XXII

The sloe was lost in flower,
The April elm was dim;
That was the lover's hour,
The hour for lies and him.

If thorns are all the bower,
If north winds freeze the fir,
Why, 'tis another's hour,
The hour for truth and her.

XXIII

In the morning, in the morning,
In the happy field of hay,
Oh they looked at one another
By the light of day.

In the blue and silver morning
On the haycock as they lay,
Oh they looked at one another
And they looked away.

XXIV

EPITHALAMIUM

He is here, Urania's son,
Hymen come from Helicon;
God that glads the lover's heart,
He is here to join and part.
So the groomsman quits your side
And the bridegroom seeks the bride:
Friend and comrade yield you o'er
To her that hardly loves you more.

Now the sun his skyward beam
Hast tilted from the Ocean stream.
Light the Indies, laggard sun:
Happy bridegroom, day is done,
And the star from Œta's steep
Calls to bed but not to sleep.

Happy bridegroom, Hesper brings
All desired and timely things.

All whom morning sends to roam,
Hesper loves to lead them home.
Home return who him behold,
Child to mother, sheep to fold,
Bird to nest from wandering wide:
Happy bridegroom, seek your bride.

Pour it out, the golden cup
Given and guarded, brimming up,
Safe through jostling markets borne
And the thicket of the thorn;
Folly spurned and danger past,
Pour it to the god at last.

Now, to smother noise and light,
Is stolen abroad the wildering night,
And the blotting shades confuse
Path and meadow full of dews;
And the high heavens, that all control,
Turn in silence round the pole.
Catch the starry beams they shed
Prospering the marriage bed,

And breed the land that reared your prime
Sons to stay the rot of time.
All is quiet, no alarms;
Nothing fear of nightly harms.
Safe you sleep on guarded ground,
And in silent circle round
The thoughts of friends keep watch and ward,
Harnessed angels, hand on sword.

XXV

THE ORACLES

'Tis mute, the word they went to hear on high Dodona mountain
When winds were in the oakenshaws and all the cauldrons tolled,
And mute's the midland navel-stone beside the singing fountain,
And echoes list to silence now where gods told lies of old.

I took my question to the shrine that has not ceased from speaking,
The heart within, that tells the truth and tells it twice as plain;
And from the cave of oracles I heard the priestess shrieking
That she and I should surely die and never live again.

Oh priestess, what you cry is clear, and sound good
sense I think it;
But let the screaming echoes rest, and froth your
mouth no more.
'Tis true there's better boose than brine, but he
that drowns must drink it;
And oh, my lass, the news is news that men have
heard before.

The King with half the East at heel is marched
from lands of morning;
Their fighters drink the rivers up, their shafts
benight the air.
And he that stands will die for nought, and home
there's no returning.
The Spartans on the sea-wet rock sat down and
combed their hair.

XXVI

The half-moon westers low, my love,
And the wind brings up the rain;
And wide apart lie we, my love,
And seas between the twain.

I know not if it rains, my love,
In the land where you do lie;
And oh, so sound you sleep, my love,
You know no more than I.

XXVII

The sigh that heaves the grasses
  Whence thou wilt never rise
Is of the air that passes
  And knows not if it sighs.

The diamond tears adorning
  Thy low mound on the lea,
Those are the tears of morning,
  That weeps, but not for thee.

XXVIII

Now dreary dawns the eastern light,
  And fall of eve is drear,
And cold the poor man lies at night,
  And so goes out the year.

Little is the luck I've had,
  And oh, 'tis comfort small
To think that many another lad
  Has had no luck at all.

XXIX

Wake not for the world-heard thunder
  Nor the chime that earthquakes toll.
Star may plot in heaven with planet,
Lightning rive the rock of granite,
Tempest tread the oakwood under:
  Fear not you for flesh nor soul.
Marching, fighting, victory past,
Stretch your limbs in peace at last.

Stir not for the soldiers drilling
  Nor the fever nothing cures:
Throb of drum and timbal's rattle
Call but man alive to battle,
And the fife with death-notes filling
  Screams for blood but not for yours.
Times enough you bled your best;
Sleep on now, and take your rest.

Sleep, my lad; the French are landed,
London's burning, Windsor's down;
Clasp your cloak of earth about you,
We must man the ditch without you,
March unled and fight short-handed,
Charge to fall and swim to drown.
Duty, friendship, bravery o'er,
Sleep away, lad; wake no more.

XXX

SINNER'S RUE

I WALKED alone and thinking,
  And faint the nightwind blew
And stirred on mounds at crossways
  The flower of sinner's rue.

Where the roads part they bury
  Him that his own hand slays,
And so the weed of sorrow
  Springs at the four cross ways.

By night I plucked it hueless,
  When morning broke 'twas blue:
Blue at my breast I fastened
  The flower of sinner's rue.

It seemed a herb of healing,
  A balsam and a sign,
Flower of a heart whose trouble
  Must have been worse than mine.

Dead clay that did me kindness,
I can do none to you,
But only wear for breastknot
The flower of sinner's rue.

XXXI

HELL GATE

Onward led the road again
Through the sad uncoloured plain
Under twilight brooding dim,
And along the utmost rim
Wall and rampart risen to sight
Cast a shadow not of night,
And beyond them seemed to glow
Bonfires lighted long ago.
And my dark conductor broke
Silence at my side and spoke,
Saying, "You conjecture well:
Yonder is the gate of hell."

Ill as yet the eye could see
The eternal masonry,
But beneath it on the dark
To and fro there stirred a spark.

And again the sombre guide
Knew my question, and replied:
"At hell gate the damned in turn
Pace for sentinel and burn."

Dully at the leaden sky
Staring, and with idle eye
Measuring the listless plain,
I began to think again.
Many things I thought of then,
Battle, and the loves of men,
Cities entered, oceans crossed,
Knowledge gained and virtue lost,
Cureless folly done and said,
And the lovely way that led
To the slimepit and the mire
And the everlasting fire.
And against a smoulder dun
And a dawn without a sun
Did the nearing bastion loom,
And across the gate of gloom

Still one saw the sentry go,
Trim and burning, to and fro,
One for women to admire
In his finery of fire.
Something, as I watched him pace,
Minded me of time and place,
Soldiers of another corps
And a sentry known before.

Ever darker hell on high
Reared its strength upon the sky,
And our footfall on the track
Fetched the daunting echo back.
But the soldier pacing still
The insuperable sill,
Nursing his tormented pride,
Turned his head to neither side,
Sunk into himself apart
And the hell-fire of his heart.
But against our entering in
From the drawbridge Death and Sin

Rose to render key and sword
To their father and their lord.
And the portress foul to see
Lifted up her eyes on me
Smiling, and I made reply:
"Met again, my lass," said I.
Then the sentry turned his head,
Looked, and knew me, and was Ned.

Once he looked, and halted straight,
Set his back against the gate,
Caught his musket to his chin,
While the hive of hell within
Sent abroad a seething hum
As of towns whose king is come
Leading conquest home from far
And the captives of his war,
And the car of triumph waits,
And they open wide the gates.
But across the entry barred
Straddled the revolted guard,

Weaponed and accoutred well
From the arsenals of hell;
And beside him, sick and white,
Sin to left and Death to right
Turned a countenance of fear
On the flaming mutineer.
Over us the darkness bowed,
And the anger in the cloud
Clenched the lightning for the stroke;
But the traitor musket spoke.

And the hollowness of hell
Sounded as its master fell,
And the mourning echo rolled
Ruin through his kingdom old.
Tyranny and terror flown
Left a pair of friends alone,
And beneath the nether sky
All that stirred was he and I.

Silent, nothing found to say,
We began the backward way;

And the ebbing lustre died
From the soldier at my side,
As in all his spruce attire
Failed the everlasting fire.
Midmost of the homeward track
Once we listened and looked back;
But the city, dusk and mute,
Slept, and there was no pursuit.

XXXII

When I would muse in boyhood
The wild green woods among,
And nurse resolves and fancies
Because the world was young,
It was not foes to conquer,
Nor sweethearts to be kind,
But it was friends to die for
That I would seek and find.

I sought them far and found them,
The sure, the straight, the brave,
The hearts I lost my own to,
The souls I could not save.
They braced their belts about them,
They crossed in ships the sea,
They sought and found six feet of ground,
And there they died for me.

XXXIII

When the eye of day is shut,
And the stars deny their beams,
And about the forest hut
Blows the roaring wood of dreams,

From deep clay, from desert rock,
From the sunk sands of the main,
Come not at my door to knock,
Hearts that loved me not again.

Sleep, be still, turn to your rest
In the lands where you are laid;
In far lodgings east and west
Lie down on the beds you made.

In gross marl, in blowing dust,
In the drowned ooze of the sea,
Where you would not, lie you must,
Lie you must, and not with me.

XXXIV

THE FIRST OF MAY

The orchards half the way
From home to Ludlow fair
Flowered on the first of May
In Mays when I was there;
And seen from stile or turning
The plume of smoke would show
Where fires were burning
That went out long ago.

The plum broke forth in green,
The pear stood high and snowed,
My friends and I between
Would take the Ludlow road;
Dressed to the nines and drinking
And light in heart and limb,
And each chap thinking
The fair was held for him.

Between the trees in flower
New friends at fairtime tread
The way where Ludlow tower
Stands planted on the dead.
Our thoughts, a long while after,
They think, our words they say;
Theirs now the laughter,
The fair, the first of May.

Ay, yonder lads are yet
The fools that we were then;
For oh, the sons we get
Are still the sons of men.
The sumless tale of sorrow
Is all unrolled in vain:
May comes to-morrow
And Ludlow fair again.

XXXV

When first my way to fair I took
  Few pence in purse had I,
And long I used to stand and look
  At things I could not buy.

Now times are altered: if I care
  To buy a thing, I can;
The pence are here and here's the fair,
  But where's the lost young man?

—To think that two and two are four
  And neither five nor three
The heart of man has long been sore
  And long 'tis like to be.

XXXVI

West and away the wheels of darkness roll,
Day's beamy banner up the east is borne,
Spectres and fears, the nightmare and her foal,
Drown in the golden deluge of the morn.

But over sea and continent from sight
Safe to the Indies has the earth conveyed
The vast and moon-eclipsing cone of night,
Her towering foolscap of eternal shade.

See, in mid heaven the sun is mounted; hark,
The belfries tingle to the noonday chime.
'Tis silent, and the subterranean dark
Has crossed the nadir, and begins to climb.

XXXVII

EPITAPH ON AN ARMY OF MERCENARIES

These, in the day when heaven was falling,
The hour when earth's foundations fled,
Followed their mercenary calling
And took their wages and are dead.

Their shoulders held the sky suspended;
They stood, and earth's foundations stay;
What God abandoned, these defended,
And saved the sum of things for pay.

XXXVIII

Oh stay at home, my lad, and plough
The land and not the sea,
And leave the soldiers at their drill,
And all about the idle hill
Shepherd your sheep with me.

Oh stay with company and mirth
And daylight and the air;
Too full already is the grave
Of fellows that were good and brave
And died because they were.

XXXIX

When summer's end is nighing
And skies at evening cloud,
I muse on change and fortune
And all the feats I vowed
When I was young and proud.

The weathercock at sunset
Would lose the slanted ray,
And I would climb the beacon
That looked to Wales away
And saw the last of day.

From hill and cloud and heaven
The hues of evening died;
Night welled through lane and hollow
And hushed the countryside,
But I had youth and pride.

And I with earth and nightfall
In converse high would stand,
Late, till the west was ashen
And darkness hard at hand,
And the eye lost the land.

The year might age, and cloudy
  The lessening day might close,
But air of other summers
  Breathed from beyond the snows,
  And I had hope of those.

They came and were and are not
  And come no more anew;
And all the years and seasons
  That ever can ensue
  Must now be worse and few.

So here's an end of roaming
  On eves when autumn nighs:
The ear too fondly listens
  For summer's parting sighs,
  And then the heart replies.

XL

Tell me not here, it needs not saying,
What tune the enchantress plays
In aftermaths of soft September
Or under blanching mays,
For she and I were long acquainted
And I knew all her ways.

On russet floors, by waters idle,
The pine lets fall its cone;
The cuckoo shouts all day at nothing
In leafy dells alone;
And traveller's joy beguiles in autumn
Hearts that have lost their own.

On acres of the seeded grasses
The changing burnish heaves;
Or marshalled under moons of harvest
Stand still all night the sheaves;
Or beeches strip in storms for winter
And stain the wind with leaves.

Possess, as I possessed a season,
The countries I resign,
Where over elmy plains the highway
Would mount the hills and shine,
And full of shade the pillared forest
Would murmur and be mine.

For nature, heartless, witless nature,
Will neither care nor know
What stranger's feet may find the meadow
And trespass there and go,
Nor ask amid the dews of morning
If they are mine or no.

XLI

FANCY'S KNELL

When lads were home from labour
At Abdon under Clee,
A man would call his neighbour
And both would send for me.
And where the light in lances
Across the mead was laid,
There to the dances
I fetched my flute and played.

Ours were idle pleasures,
Yet oh, content we were,
The young to wind the measures,
The old to heed the air;
And I to lift with playing
From tree and tower and steep
The light delaying,
And flute the sun to sleep.

The youth toward his fancy
Would turn his brow of tan,
And Tom would pair with Nancy
And Dick step off with Fan;
The girl would lift her glances
To his, and both be mute:
Well went the dances
At evening to the flute.

Wenlock Edge was umbered,
And bright was Abdon Burf,
And warm between them slumbered
The smooth green miles of turf;
Until from grass and clover
The upshot beam would fade,
And England over
Advanced the lofty shade.

The lofty shade advances,
I fetch my flute and play:
Come, lads, and learn the dances
And praise the tune to-day.

To-morrow, more's the pity,
  Away we both must hie,
To air the ditty,
  And to earth I.

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